

From Executive Director Terence McFarland

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This is a reprint of the opening speech given by Terence McFarland at the 2007 Ovation Awards Ceremony.

I was recently asked, what role do arts play in an election year?

Jim the Hangar lifts heavy sides of beef in *Bleed Rail*, and Troy Maxson lifts heavy garbage cans in *Fences* but *you*, are the heavy lifters in the intellectual and cultural life of Los Angeles Theatre.

Just as those characters need to protect their backs, so must we all preserve our philosophical health, the strength of our motivation and the integrity of our inspiration.

As the body nurtures itself in sleep, we take this evening's pause to repair and dream. We may dream of being worthy of honors, of having our work evoke tears and hurrahs, of our work changing the world. But first we must make sure we are doing what makes us necessary.

As parents, we dream our children will be leaders, visionaries, geniuses. But what is necessary is that we provide them food, shelter and medical care. And that we make sure our neighbors can do the same.

What makes us necessary, are our imaginations. John Guare put it best. "The imagination is the passport we create to take us into the real world. I believe the imagination is another phrase for what is most uniquely us." Your imaginations reveal our national purpose.

It is for you to show our politicians what that is, not for them to define it for us!

Your imaginations have represented us to the world since the first modern American musical, and will continue to do so through the shows honored tonight. Without exception, the imaginations behind every play nominated tonight, show us in some way, how we and our world are connected.

I would rather my President see one good production of *Our Town* than spend four years getting C's at Yale.

In the '40s, playwright Robert Sherwood wrote speeches for Roosevelt. In 1990, Czechoslovakia cut out the middleman and elected the playwright President. Imagine what opportunities the next year presents!

As several of our World Premiere nominees explore, these have been difficult years for our country. But by this time next year . . . there'll be some changes made.

This is the year of change.

The call to action is now. It may not be convenient. It certainly won't be on your timetable. We'll have to work harder and smarter to get it all done but defining our culture, is what is at stake. Like the production of *Waiting for Godot* staged a week ago in an empty intersection, by a lone tree, amid

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hurricane debris in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans . . . it's about food and shelter. It's about what's necessary. You are necessary.

Whether through song or dance, metaphor or rhyme, you play a vital role in the national conversation.

You have uniquely trained eyes and ears, sensitive to nuance and subtext, trained to see the truth and the lie in pause and in gesture. Be vigilant and bear witness.

Here's the thing. You say what you have to say, not under cover of the internet or thru a TV or movie screen, but in person, eye to eye, under bright lights, night after night, in a medium where everything that is not the truth is exposed.

Your willingness to experiment with themes and form can be an example in our national debate.

You prove in your work, there is no human being UNworthy of examination and understanding.

You know how to turn dollars into truth and beauty, nurturing talent, transforming neighborhoods and launching futures.

And . . . You know if there's a gun on the table in the first act, it'll be used in the third.

What might the next year look like?

Imagine reviews of the presidential campaigns written by Steven Leigh Morris.

Imagine this question at the next debate — "How many of August Wilson's plays have you seen or read?" . . . or "Does a great nation deserve great art? And are you willing to pay for it?"

Imagine a policy speech, whether by a candidate for the school board OR the presidency, written by Dael Orlandersmith . . . or Justin Tanner.

Imagine a foreign policy conducted in person, eye to eye, by experts in nuance and subtext.

Imagine . . . taking the nuclear weapons off the table before the first act begins.

Your imaginations are our greatest national resource. The open and active minds of our audiences, our most precious treasure . . . We're more than an alliance. We're a revolution. ■